

Federal Funds Build on Successes of Rural Area Economic Partnership Program Which Hinchey Established in 1999

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that the Tioga Rural Area Economic Partnership Program (REAP), which Hinchey established in 1999, will receive a \$114,000 investment from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's regional initiative program. Hinchey was instrumental in securing the investment, which will be used to help create jobs and grow the agriculture sector by allowing REAP to work with county landowners, entrepreneurs and community leaders to convert forest and farm products to bio-fuels and bring those fuels to market.

"Tioga County will benefit substantially from this investment, which will allow the local stakeholders to better work together in establishing a local bio-fuels industry," said Hinchey who wrote a letter in strong support of the application earlier this year. "That means jobs for local workers, and enhanced economic development that will result from the increased demand for agriculture and forest products from the area. I'm so pleased that this is finally moving forward."

"We're very pleased to get this funding so we can offer training and economic development opportunities for county residents. We'll be advancing bio-energy programs and enhancing the knowledge of residents who participate in the REAP training," said Tioga REAP President Tom Bailey.

In July, Hinchey announced that he secured approval from a House panel for \$250,000 in federal funds to allow the REAP to hire a new executive director, identify needs and opportunities for economic development and to coordinate applications for competitive grants from federal and state agencies and private foundations. Since its creation, Hinchey has worked to secure over \$20 million in federal, state and local funding for the Tioga REAP for projects including:

- Workshops to help small business owners improve operations
- Upgrades and improvements to sewer and water infrastructure in the Town of Barton
- Renovations to the town square and park improvements in the Village of Newark Valley
- Improvements to infrastructure needed to attract development in Lounsberry

Hinchey developed the REAP Zone initiative as part of an effort to help spur economic development in struggling rural areas. REAP Zones are akin to the internationally recognized

Empowerment Zones & Enterprise Communities and are pilot projects of the USDA. In January 1999, Hinchey persuaded the USDA to establish this new program in his congressional district on a 10-year trial basis, which was approved by the Clinton administration. As a result, a REAP Zone covering all of Tioga County and a second zone in Sullivan County and Wawarsing were established. The REAP Zones in the State of New York are two of only five such areas in the entire nation.

Last year, USDA Rural Development signed an agreement with both the Tioga REAP and Sullivan County-Wawarsing REAP that extended the REAP program for those areas until September 30, 2012. The authorization to extend the REAP program was made possible through agricultural legislation that Hinchey helped pass through Congress in 2008.

The REAP Zone established a collaborative, citizen-led effort to enhance economic development and enable local communities to develop and implement strategies to create long-term prosperity. The two REAP Zones in New York were established in critical parts of the state that had experienced economic dislocation and job loss as the state's rural economy changed. The REAP Zone initiatives serve as an important model for coordinated efforts to revitalize and diversify distressed rural economies in other regions of New York State and the country.